

Choudhury speaks out on social security

Lothians MSP, Foyso Choudhury, has called on The Scottish Government to be ambitious in its approach to Social Security.

During a debate in The Scottish Parliament titled ‘‘*Accessing Scottish Social Security Benefits*’’, he called for the rise of the Scottish Child Payment to £40 a week in 2022/23.

He explained that over a quarter of Scottish children now live in poverty in Scotland. He also drew attention to the need to raise the “20 metre rule”, which means that if you can walk one step over 20 metres you cannot access the enhanced rate of mobility support.

The MS Society Scotland has also called for the extension of the rule saying that it has acted as a barrier to people with MS accessing social security benefits.

Mr Choudhury had asked the Government was prepared to change the eligibility criteria.

After the debate, Mr Choudhury said: ‘‘Scotland needs to be ambitious.

‘‘The devolution of welfare powers gives us the chance to shape what kind of society do we want to be.

‘‘The chance to restore dignity and respect to the heart of the social security system, yet now we know that the delay of the SNP has only halted the progress and affects the potential

benefit takeup for Scotland.''



10th July 2021 Edinburgh – ELREC Chairperson and Lothians MSP, Foysool Choudhury, joins with volunteers from ELREC to celebrate their work handing out food hampers during the coronavirus pandemic. PHOTO Live Edinburgh News

Mr Choudhury's speech is below:

Presiding Officer, the devolution of welfare powers gives us the chance to shape what kind of society do we want to be. The chance to restore dignity and respect to the heart of the social security system, yet now we know that the delay of the SNP has only halted the progress and affects the potential benefit takeup for Scotland.

There can be no doubt that Covid-19 has hit low-income families and the most vulnerable disproportionately hard, deepening poverty and dragging more families into financial insecurity. Today half of the families in poverty have a member who is a disabled person and even before the pandemic, child poverty rates were high and projected to rise further.

The over next decade, Scotland must be bold, must be willing to use the full levers of powers to transform if we are to meet our targets on child poverty and live up to our ambitions of being a nation that respects, protects and fulfils human rights and where we can all achieve our potential.

We can start of course with the Scottish Child payment, something that has continued to be on the minds of the chamber thanks to the efforts of my friend and colleague, Pam Duncan Glancy.

Just over a quarter of Scottish children live in poverty in Scotland. 260,000 children, right now in 2021. That's something that should shame us all. We talk a lot, but this Parliament needs to seriously get ambitious for Scotland's children.

Let's raise the Scottish Child Payment to £40 a week in 2022/23. Let's ensure that every kid in Scotland have a good quality of life, without the people that love them having to worry about where the money is coming from.

Even with the full rollout, the Scottish Government is likely to miss their interim child poverty target by six percentage points – leaving an extra 50,000 children in poverty. From the end of the furlough, the cruel cut to Universal Credit thanks to the Tories, and the Scottish Government delays to rolling out and increasing the Child Payment have squeezed Scottish family incomes when they are already having to deal with the economic shocks dealt by the pandemic. We can and must do better.

Presiding Officer, for those with lifelong conditions, they look to this chamber and ask, 'how are you going to defend me'?

Those with MS for example are looking for hope. The MS Society, Labour and many organisations are all calling for the removal of the 20-metre rule from the proposed Adult Disability Payment. The Scottish Government are replacing PIP with ADP and as part of this new benefit, the Government has largely replicated the PIP eligibility criteria, including retaining the 20-metre rule as part of the assessment criteria for ADP.

A Citizens Advice Scotland Survey in 2021 found that a majority of Bureaux advisers working to help people with disabilities navigate the social security system agree that the 20 metre rule should be extended to 50 metres. Presiding Officer, for those who don't know that the 20-metre rule is, it was introduced as part of the eligibility criteria to access Personal Independence Payment. Under the rule, if you can walk one step over 20 metres you cannot access the enhanced rate of mobility support.

Fatigue, both physical and mental is one of the most debilitating symptoms of MS and other neurological conditions. The rule does not consider the severity of fatigue many will experience after walking 20 metres.

So, I would be grateful if the Government can respond to concerns raised by those who have MS. Is the Government prepared to change the eligibility criteria. Because those claiming disability payments deserve dignity and respect.

Presiding Officer, the social security system we shape in this Parliament must ensure no one is held back by poverty and inequality. Scottish Labour would use all the powers we have here in Scotland to make sure that people have the support they need to participate fully in society.

The social security system Labour would build to secure the wellbeing and human rights of everyone and seek to guarantee a Minimum Income Standard that no one would fall below. Having a strong, adequate and automated SSS will lead to higher levels of takeup.

Scottish Labour will build a social security system based on the principles of Adequacy, Respect and Simplicity. Those are the principles that will guide me as we come together to shape our Social security for Scotland to ensure it works for all.